Albums

Reviewers: Dave Ramsden, John Orme, Bob Gallagher

Howlin' wolf

DENNIS BROWN: "Wolf And Leopards" (D.E.B. Music MOLP 1). Produced by **Dennis Brown, Castro Brown** and **Niney.** No musicians credited.

AT THE age of 20, Dennis Brown already has an impressive career behind him. Enormously popular on the reggae scene, he fully merits the scale of attention given to such artists as Bob Marley and Burning Spear.

This album, his third in the last year, equals if not surpasses, the power of the previous two. A British release on his own D.E.B. label, will presumably reach a wider audience than the others, which were imports.

His greatest asset is his exceptional voice, purer-toned and more controlled than many reggae singers, but with the passion of the best. He excels on songs, often his own compositions, which carry a strong and serious message but can also convincingly tackle lighter material. His version of Leroy Sibbles' "Party Time" here is better than the Heptones' own recent recording.

"Wolf And Leopards," which opens side one, is a plea to the more predatory elements in society to "leave the sheep alone." First appearing at the height of the Jamaican state of emergency, it remains a powerful, beautiful song.

"Emmanuel" and "Here I Come" are also pleas for peace, but performed in a more religious setting. "Emmanuel" is a hynotic song with backing voices and a heavy drum beat giving the feeling of a rasta chant.

"Here I Come" draws its inspiration from the psalms "Here I come with love and not hatred / Surely goodness and mercy shall follow I all the days of my life." With an unusual but effective backing track, this song attains a level of perfection unmatched by anything I've heard this year.

Nothing else on the album can equal these three masterpieces, but there is no dross either. "Created By The Father" and "Rolling Down" (also known as "Rain From The Skies") are successfully updated versions of songs he recorded in his early days. "Whip Them Jah," "Children Of Israel," "Boasting" and "Lately Girl" are all fine songs and his vocals are faultless throughout.

This is essential listening for anyone seriously interested in Jamaican music. Check out his import album, "Visions," on the Joe Gibbs label if this whets your appetite for his unique voice. — **D.R.**

RONNIE DIO OF RAINBOW: among the lustier tonsils of his generation

RAINBOW: "On Stage" (Polydor). Rainbow are a heavy band. You remember heavy bands? Plenty of bass, thunderous drums, yards of lead guitar? Of course you remember, my little spiky head. Well, Rainbow had no real trouble getting gigs ,and at one of them they took along a mobile recording studio and captured in realistic stereo everything that went on, and here it is, a record that is so successful in America that the band has just blown out a whole series of British concerts to go over there for some gigs. As a heavy band, the guitarist was looked on as a hero, an electric wizard, and Ritchie Blackmore (you have heard of Deep Purple?) was reckoned to be one of the best. Certainly while these concerts were being recorded, there were times when Mr Blackmore was almost subtle. The tumultously received blitzkrieg of "Man On A Silver Mountain" slips oh-so-cleverly into a restrained blues, and Ritchie's own "Mistreated" works through influences from mediaeval to jazz. Alongside Mr Blackmore was Ronnie James Dio, a young singer among the lustier tonsils of his generation.To his credit his singing was distinctive in a field not renowned for individualism. Although the audience loved every minute, there are a few numbers that stood out that night as better than others. "Catch The Rainbow" moved from a slinky intro into passages that built in mood and power, giving the band's two main instrumentalists a chance to demonstrate their prowess, despite a facile and repetitive keyboard riff. "16th Century Greensleeves" was a piece with a mock-mediaeval guitar start that slams rapidly into heavy metal. The rather tiresome "Still I'm Sad" went in headfirst and never surfaced. An odd thing about this album, my little razor-bladed chum, is that apart from it lasting less than an hour — and there are four sides, remember? — the engineer got a reasonable recorded sound on the guitar, vocals and keyboard, but the bass falls flat, and the drums of Mr Cozy Powell, never a man to hold back on power, sound empty and weak. If you listen to this album, you will understand more clearly why you turned to the frantic pace of punk-power — you might also get an idea why so many of those boring old farts still like to wallow back and let a guitarist take them away. Me? Well, I found the whole thing a big, repetitious yawn; but that is, you understand, a purely PERSONAL point of view. —**J.O.**

DETROIT EMERALDS: "Feel The Need" (Atlantic). In 1972 the Detroit Emeralds' original version of their "Feel The Need" single spent what seemed like months in our Top 30. Two years later, for reasons not fully explained, the group broke up and, after personnel additions, two new outfits popped up. One was led by original Emerald Abrim Tilmon and kept the coveted name. The other went out as James, Carl and Ivory, and comprised the other two founder Emeralds, James Mitchell and Ivory Tilmon (Abe's brother), plus one Carl Johnson. Neither group prospered. Recently, a compromise was reached: Mitchell and Ivory Tilmon persuaded Abe back into the studio (although not onto the road) and, with the addition of ex-MD Marvin Willis, the "new" Detroit Emeralds appeared. This album, however, is hardly spanking-new product. It's made up of rejiggings of familiar Emeralds songs like "Set It Out," "Look What's Happened To Our Love," "Sexy Ways" and, of course, "Feel The Need." The vocals have all been recut, but the actual tracks are simply Tom Moulton remixes of the originals. But as a means of reintroducing one of the early Seventies' most popular vocal groups, the album succeeds. Be warned: in "Love For You" and "Sexy Ways," it carries a couple of stinkers, but the delightfully boppy "Feel The Need," "Set It Out" and the moving "Love Has Come To Me" more than compensate. — **B.G.**

PARLIAMENT "Chocolate City" (Casablanca). If you've still to tune into George Clinton's weirdly wonderful wavelength, the two-year-old "Chocolate City" can be highly recommended as a comparatively easy-to-follow intro to lysergofunk. One of Pye's three Parliament repromotions, it strikes a neat balance between gut immediacy and trickiness. Tracks like "Ride On," "What Comes Funky" and "Big Footin'" leave their mark after one play and try nothing fancy aurally. But others demand, and reward, concentration. The legendary title track features all sorts of instrumental quirkiness: thunderous acoustic piano figures hammer against elegant sheets of synthesizer, the same piano has a cacophonous single-finger fit, saxes soar off into fragmented solos or joust with each other at the edge of the rhythmic action. "Together" is an altogether more disciplined piece but the sudden appearance of an Eddie Calvertesque trumpet passage amid the precise funk soon undermines that discipline. "Let Me Be" is stranger than strange — a classical keyboard nightmare. Like Jacques. Loussier gone bananas or Bach on speed.—**B.G.**